

## Message Text

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FM AMEMBASSY BEIRUT

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INFO AMEMBASSY AMMAN

AMEMBASSY CAIRO

AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS

AMEMBASSY JIDDA

AMEMBASSY KUWAIT

AMEMBASSY LONDON UYHTC

AMEMBASSY PARIS

S E C R E T BEIRUT 6420

EXDIS

E.O. 11652: XGDS

TAGS: PFOR, PINS, PINT, AEMR, MILI, LE

SUBJECT: LEBANESE PRIME MINISTER PROPOSES NEW INITIATIVE

1. SUMMARY. PRIME MINISTER KARAME CONCURS IN VIEW THAT SYRIAN POLICY IS TO BALANCE OFF MARONITES AND MOSLEMS. HE BELIEVES ARAFAT WANTS AGREEMENT WITH ASSAD AND HAS BEEN HELD BACK BY PALESTINIAN "EXTREMISTS." HE SEES PHALANGISTS AS FORCE FOR MODERATION ON MARONITE SIDE. HE SAYS THAT NOW HE HAS COME ROUND TO VIEW THAT MOSLEM-CHRISTIAN RECONCILIATION WILL HAVE TO PRECEDE PALESTINIAN-SYRIAN AGREEMENT. HE INTENDS TO PROPOSE A CEASEFIRE, LEADING TO MOSLEM-CHRISTIAN DIALOGUE, BASED ON OPENING OF FOUR ACCESS ROUTES, INCLUDING THREE ACROSS THE DIVIDING LINE. THESE ROUTES ARE PATROLLED BY ARAB LEAGUE FORCE, WOULD INTER ALIA OPEN BEIRUT AIRPORT AND CENTRAL BANK TO MARONITES AND OPEN TELL ZAATAR TO NON-MILITARY LINKS WITH MOSLEM BEIRUT. WHILE KARAME PROPOSAL OFFERS SOMETHING TO ALL PARTIES, ODDS APPEAR TO BE AGAINST ITS SUCCESS. END SUMMARY.

2. I CALLED ON PRIME MINISTER RASHID KARAME TODAY, JULY -75 TO EXCHANGE VIEWS AND ALSO TO EXPLAIN CIRCUMSTANCES OF TOMORROW'S EVACUATION. RE LATTER, I NOTED REPORTS WHICH HAVE BEEN CIRCULATING

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IMPLYING THAT USG EXPECTS IMMINENT WORSENING OF SECURITY SITUATION

IN WEST BEIRUT AND THAT THIS IS REASON FOR EVACUATION. I SAID THAT FOR MANY WEEKS WE HAVE BEEN URGING AMERICANS TO LEAVE BECAUSE OF THE SECURITY SITUATION BUT THAT THE NEW FACTORS INDUCING US TO PROPOSE TOMORROW'S EVACUATION ARE DETERIORATING LIVING CONDITIONS AND THE SHORTAGE OF VITAL SUPPLIES. I WANTED PRIME MINISTER TO KNOW THAT USG WAS IN FACT DOING NO MORE THAN MOST OTHER EMBASSIES HAVE ALREADY DONE IN TERMS OF REDUCING THEIR STAFFS, AND THAT USG CONTINUES TO BE KEENLY INTERESTED IN AND CONCERNED ABOUT LEBANON, AND IT REMAINS AVAILABLE TO HELP WHEREVER POSSIBLE. PRIME MINISTER SAID HE HAD HEARD REPORT OUT OF WASHINGTON THAT I WAS LEAVING. I REPLIED THAT I WOULD NOT ACCOMPANY CONVOY, BUT AT SOME POINT SOON I WOULD NEED TO RETURN TO WASHINGTON TO GIVE MY ASSESSMENT OF THE SITUATION.

3. PRIME MINISTER AND I HAD INTERESTING CONVERGENCE OF VIEWS ON EVOLVING SITUATION. BOTH OF US CONSIDERED IT UNLIKELY THAT SYRIANS WOULD ATTACK WEST BEIRUT OR THAT IT WAS IN SYRIA'S INTEREST TO ALLOW MARONITES TO FIGHT THEIR WAY INTO RAS BEIRUT. KARAME SAID THAT NEITHER SYRIANS NOR MARONITES COULD AFFORD THE DAMAGE TO THEIR IMAGES WHICH WOULD FLOW FROM A FRONTAL ATTACK IN THIS AREA. WE AGREED THAT SYRIAN POLICY IS TO BALANCE OFF CHRISTIANS AND MOSLEMS AND THAT CURRENT SYRIAN-MARONITE ALLIANCE IS PROBABLY ONE OF TEMPORARY CONVENIENCE. KARAME SAID, HISTORICALLY, THERE IS NO CONVERGENCE OF INTERESTS BETWEEN THESE TWO PARTIES. KARAME CONFIRMED MY IMPRESSION THAT YASSIR ARAFAT WANTS TO MEET WITH ASSAD IN EFFORT TO WORK OUT AGREEMENT WITH SYRIANS, BUT THAT HE HAS BEEN HELD BACK BY PALESTINIAN "EXTREMISTS." WE ALSO SHARED VIEW THAT PHALANGE IS A FORCE FOR MODERATION ON OTHER SIDE, AND KARAME WENT SO FAR AS TO SAY THAT PIERRE GEMAYEL IS SYMPATHETIC TO POLITICAL REFORMS DESIRED BY MOSLEMS. KARAME IDENTIFIED FRANGIE AS MAJOR MARONITE OBSTACLE TO RECONCILIATION.

4. KARAME SAID THAT HE HAD COME ROUND TO VIEW THAT ONLY WAY TO BREAK CURRENT DEADLOCK AND ACHIEVE CEASEFIRE IS FOR LEBANESE FACTIONS TO GET TOGETHER FIRST. HE NOW CONSIDERS THIS A NECESSARY PRE-  
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CONDITION TO AN EVENTUAL PALESTINIAN-SYRIAN RECONCILIATION. WHILE JUNBLATT, HE SAID, HAS STOOD IN WAY OF ARAFAT'S MAKING DEAL WITH SYRIANS, ONE WAY TO ALLEVIATE JUNBLATT'S OPPOSITION IS TO DRAW HIM INTO NEW MOSLEM-CHRISTIAN DIALOGUE. KARAME SAID HE HAD A

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"PRESENTIMENT" THAT JUNBLATT, NOTING THAT ARAFAT IS BEING TUGGED IN DIRECTION OF SYRIANS, MIGHT BE WILLING AT THIS POINT TO PARTICIPATE IN  
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RENEWED MOSLEM DIALOGUE WITH MARONITES AS PRETEXT FOR DROPPING HIS OPPOSITION TO ARAFAT-ASSAD GET-TOGETHER.

5. KARAME SAID THAT CONTACTS HE HAS MADE IN LAST FEW DAYS LEAD HIM TO FEEL THAT MOSLEMS ARE READY TO TALK REASONABLY WITH MARONITES

AND THAT MARONITES MAY BE READY TO DO THE SAME. HE HAD TALKED TO AN-NAHAR PUBLISHER AND LABOR MINISTER GHASSAN TUEINI A COUPLE OF DAYS AGO AND HAD ASKED TUEINI TO CONVEY TO CHAMOUN, UPON HIS RETURN TO MARONITE SECTOR YESTERDAY, A PROPOSED SCENARIO AS FIRST STEP IN DIRECTION OF CEASEFIRE PRECEDENT TO RENEWAL OF DIALOGUE BETWEEN MUSLIMS AND CHRISTIANS.

6. SCENARIO WHICH KARAME PROPOSES IS AS FOLLOWS: ESTABLISHMENT OF FOUR "OPEN" ROUTES ACROSS THE DIVIDING LINE TO BE PATROLLED BY ARAB LEAGUE FORCES. (1) AN ACCESS ROUTE FROM CHRISTIAN SIDE TO BEIRUT AIRPORT; (2) AN ACCESS ROUTE FROM WEST BEIRUT TO BEIRUT AIRPORT; (3) AN ACCESS ROUTE FROM MARONITE SIDE TO CENTRAL BANK IN WEST BEIRUT; AND (4) AN ACCESS ROUTE FROM WEST BEIRUT TO TELL ZAATAR CAMP FOR PURPOSES ONLY OF TRANSPORTING FOODSTUFFS AND MEDICINES BUT NOT REPTILES OR ARMS. KARAME SAID THAT HE WOULD MAKE THIS PROPOSAL PUBLIC TODAY AND WOULD APPEAL TO MARONITES TO GIVE IT SERIOUS ATTENTION. HE SAID IN HIS DECLARATION HE WOULD ALSO WARN THEM AGAINST COUNTING ON LASTING SYRIAN SUPPORT.

7. IN RESPONSE TO MY QUESTION AS TO WHETHER ONE COULD EXPECT PALESTINIAN COMPLIANCE WITH ANY SUCH PROPOSAL, KARAME REPLIED THAT PALESTINIANS HAVE OVERRIDING INTEREST IN TELL ZAATAR, AND OPENING UP TELL ZAATAR TO OUTSIDE WORLD WOULD BE ATTRACTIVE TO THEM. (PRESUMABLY ALSO THIS WOULD MEAN THAT MARONITES WOULD HAVE TO ABANDON SIEGE OF TELL ZAATAR AND THUS PALESTINIANS WOULD BE ABLE TO CLAIM THAT REMAINING TELL ZAATAR DEFENDERS HAD HELD FAST.)

8. I OBSERVED THAT JUNBLATT AND CHAMOUN SEEM TO BE CRITICAL ELEMENTS IN EQUATION AND WONDERED WHETHER EITHER ONE WOULD AGREE TO KARAME'S CEASEFIRE PROPOSITION OR WITH REOPENING A DIALOGUE. KARAME ADMITTED THAT THE "KEMAL-CAMILLE" MONKEY WRENCH HAD FOR MANY MONTHS SABOTAGED THE LEBANESE POLITICAL MACHINERY.

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BUT HE STILL THOUGHT JUNBLATT MIGHT BE PREPARED TO COME AROUND NOW AND HE WAS HOPEFUL THAT CHAMOUN MIGHT ALSO UNBEND.

9. WHEN I EXPRESSED VIEW THAT SYRIAN-EGYPTIAN RECONCILIATION COULD BE HELPFUL TO LEBANESE SITUATION, KARAME FULLY AGREED. HE SAID THAT, HISTORICALLY, WHEN EGYPTIANS AND SYRIANS ARE WORKING TOGETHER, MIDDLE EAST IS A CALMER PLACE.

10. COMMENT: KARAME'S PROPOSED NEW INITIATIVE HAS SOME ATTRACTIONS FOR ALL SIDES. MARONITES HAVE LONG WANTED ACCESS TO BEIRUT AIRPORT AND WOULD CERTAINLY WELCOME AN UNENCUMBERED ROUTE TO CENTRAL BANK. QUESTION IS WHETHER THEY CONSIDER THIS WORTH GIVING UP PSYCHOLOGICAL TRUMP CARD OF TOTAL VICTORY AT TELL ZAATAR. ALSO MARONITES, WHO ARE RIDING HIGH, MAY FEEL THAT THEY CAN GET WHAT THEY WANT BY FIGHTING WITHOUT HAVING TO MAKE ANY

CONCESSINS (UNLESS SYRIANS RESTRAIN THEM) DEAL SHOULD BE ATTRACTIVE TO OVERWHELMING MAJORITY OF MOSLEMS, WHO ARE INCREASINGLY FED UP WITH SYRIANS AND PALESTINIANS AND ARE LOOKING FOR A WAY OF GETTING OUT FROM UNDER PLO DOMINATIN OF WEST BEIRUT. PSYCHOLOGICAL PLUS FOR PALESTINIANS IS AVOIDING TOTAL CAPITULATION AT TELL ZAATAR. ALSO, SUFFERING REVERSES ON ALL FRONTS, PLO MIGHT SEE ADVANTAGES TO EARLY CEASEFIRE. IF LEBANESE AND PALESTINIANS AGREE TO CEASEFIRE ON TERMS WHICH REQUIRE NO FURTHER SYRIAN WITHDRAWALS, SYRIANS SHOULD BE PLEASED. BUT, OF COURSE, ODDS ARE AGAINST SUCCESS, JUDGING FROM PAST PERFORMANCE. NEVERTHELESS, KARAME'S INITIATIVE REPRESENTS AN INTERESTING NEW TWIST. UP UNTIL NOW, CONVENTIONAL THINKING HAS BEEN THAT PALESTINIAN-SYRIAN AGREEMENT MUST PRECEDE MOSLEM-CHRISTIAN RECONCILATION. WITH ALL EFFORTS TO SECURE SYRIAN-PALESTINIAN AGREEMENT HAVING ABORTED, KARAME'S NEW TACTIC OF PUTTING LEBANESE CART BEFORE SYRIAN-PALESTINIAN HORSE IS WORTH TRYING. AS HE SAYS, IF LEBANESE CAN PUT THIER OWN HOUSE IN SOME DEGREE OF ORDER, PALESTINIANS WOULD HAVE NO REASON TO OPPOSE ACQUIESCING IN SOMETHING LIKE 1969 CAIRO ACCORD.THEN, SAYS KARAME, SYRIANS WOULD BE REQUESTED TO LEAVE LEBANON. TOO PAT, MAYBE, BUT KARAME SHOULD GET A FOR EFFORT.  
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